

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

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CHAPTER VI. IN THE PORCH.

THAT wonderful day—on which Geoffrey Thorne first realised Poppy Latimer as a woman, and knew the strength of his love for her—was followed for him by a sleepless night. He sat long at his window, under the quaint shadows of hanging vine-leaves, and watched the moon till it sank behind the south-western mountains. He walked up and down his room, not knowing whether he was absolutely happy or utterly miserable: now feeling that he would give worlds to end a life which must be nothing but disappointment, then remembering that she had asked him in plain words to come to Bryans that autumn. Of course he would go. Better death near her than life far away. In short, Geoffrey worried himself with all the imaginations natural to a man in love—a good, honest fellow at heart, and unfortunately in love with the moon.

He went away from the hotel very early in the morning, fetched his sketching things from the studio, and rowed across the lake in a gold mist, as the sun was just rising, and Herzheim with its mountains glowing in most enchanting beauty. There was a little village, far away on the other side, at the opening of a long valley, which had already been the starting-point of several sketching expeditions. Further up, the views of lake and mountain were lovelier than any to be had from Herzheim; and the town itself, with its mediæval roofs and towers, came into one of these views

like a city in a dream. A former sketch of this difficult subject had not satisfied him. He meant to make another to-day, and then, what could he do but offer it to Poppy? It must be better than anything he had done yet. She certainly cared for art. She had been charming about his pictures in the studio, and still more charming last night when she talked in the orchard.

A little picture to hang, perhaps, in her own room at Bryans. While Geoffrey planned it, his boat skimming over the gold-rippling water, he felt once more that instinct of power and triumph which had flashed upon him like a bird of passage yesterday by the river. To work for her was better than to sit and dream about her. Perhaps the poor soul felt too keenly even now that despair lay at the end of that road of dreams. He was an odd mixture of fact and fancy, of certainty and doubt, of romance and matter-of-fact; clever and self-deceiving, yet ready at any moment to accept disillusion; living, in fact, in the expectation of it. He knew very well that this new-old love had sent him off his balance, suddenly becoming an influence in his life with which he could hardly reckon. Yet, at the bottom of things, his self-confidence lay unstirred. Even now he knew, with a sort of disgust, that Poppy Latimer did not hold his whole life in those slender hands of hers.

It was, perhaps, as well for Geoffrey that he did not know Poppy's own state of mind after that talk with him in the orchard. For her thoughts of him were almost affectionate. "Il est mon pays," a French girl might have said; and Poppy, the high-minded, the well-bred, had much of this feeling in her thoroughly English nature. He belonged to her home, to her

old Bryans. He was a nice recollection of childhood—when a little girl had been quite ready to accept the loyal devotion of a big boy. And she liked him now, very, very much, with almost more than a friendly feeling. She liked those good dark eyes of his, full of honest simplicity and enthusiasm. She liked his love for his art, his true feeling for nature; she liked, little feudal lady as she was, the consciousness of his admiration and reverence for herself. There was nothing unnatural in these; they were what they had always been, except that grown-up people are different from children, and that now it was possible to be real friends—to really understand each other. Any ambitious development of such feelings never occurred to Poppy as possible; it would be "too stupid." But truly and literally she never thought of such a thing, even when Geoffrey seemed to envy the mountains their poetical interest for her. Poppy's was what may be called a "one-fold" nature, with no suspicions and few stray ideas. Dear Poppy, in this and other ways, was a woman of an earlier time than ours.

Her very real personal feeling for Geoffrey Thorne took the shape of much anxious thought about his future, which the inferiority she felt in his art made painfully doubtful. She was also much occupied with the plan her aunt had suggested: his marriage with her favourite village neighbour. It would be very nice in many ways, she thought. Especially nice for Maggie, who would always want some strong friend to help and love her. The only question was—and this showed, more perhaps than anything else, Poppy's feeling for her artist friend—whether the girl would be good enough for him.

Poppy was quite ready, like Madame de Choiseul before the French Revolution, to arrange marriages for her vassals; but she never wished to use her power tyrannically. Even that charming Marquise, with her mixed objects of benevolence and fun, took pains to enquire whether her boy and girl peasants had "*de l'inclination*" for each other, and thus met with her disappointments now and then.

Poppy was not likely to take any stronger step than what she had already taken—misunderstood alas!—that of suggesting to Geoffrey that he had better go home in the autumn. Then he and Maggie were sure to meet; and an artist was sure to admire a beautiful girl; and Maggie,

under her teaching, had learnt a great respect for genius. So, perhaps, it would not matter if she could not quite appreciate Geoffrey. In fact, he must not marry a woman who could not from her heart admire his drawings. That meant, Poppy had to confess to herself with a sigh, that he must not marry a very clever woman. She must look up to him and admire his character, and make life easy for a rather sensitive temper. Yes, it is always better, Poppy assured herself, when two geniuses do not marry. A clever man's wife ought not to know too much. Above all things, she must not be or even think herself cleverer than her husband.

On the whole, Maggie would be a good wife for Geoffrey, and especially because she could not draw a line. And so, having decided this matter to her satisfaction, Poppy fell asleep at last.

Perhaps the man who had loved her from a child would have been glad to know that so much of her thoughts were given to him on the last evening that they were to remain unoccupied with more interesting concerns of her own. Yet it was much better that he should know nothing, for the knowledge of her innocent plans would have given him keen pain at the time, and he had not arrived at that sad stage of love when a lover finds himself thankful for any thought at all.

Poppy found the next day rather long and wearisome. Her aunt had caught a slight chill from sitting so long in the moonlight, and this brought on a tiresome little cough to which she was subject. Her bright spirits had gone down, in spite of expecting her friends, and she announced that she could not go out, but meant to spend her time writing letters till Mrs. Nugent arrived.

Otto lingered about the hotel in the morning and tried to talk to Poppy, who had taken herself into the garden with a book. He did not find her very sociable. Jealous in advance for Arthur, he did not quite like the way in which her eyes wandered now and then down into the garden, up to the terrace, across into the orchard; and he was personally injured by the consciousness that she was not very anxious for his company, and not particularly sorry when he observed that he was going down to meet the twelve o'clock boat. His people might arrive, though he hardly thought it likely. Otto half suspected that the painter was lurking somewhere not far off, and would appear as

soon as he was out of the way. He more than half suspected that this was in Poppy's mind, too; certainly, if she had any such idea, she took no pains to hide it. But he went and he came back—alone, for his people did not arrive—and found Poppy also still alone, still reading with a little air of distraction, as if her eyes were in one place and her thoughts in another. He was very right; she was thinking of Geoffrey Thorne, wondering if anything she had said last night could possibly have hurt him; wondering where he was, and why all that long morning had passed without his coming to speak to her.

It was with an unequalled coolness, which fairly astonished the cynical mind of Otto, that she got up, laid down her book—for the luncheon bell was ringing—and said to him in her earnest, preoccupied way:

"Have you seen my friend this morning?"

"Your friend?" muttered Otto, looking at her hard, and assuming a stupidity he did not possess; "your friend? You don't mean your aunt, by chance? I didn't know you had a friend here."

If he thought that such a poor affectation as this would deepen by one faint shade the colour in Poppy's soft pale cheeks, he was very thoroughly mistaken.

"Of course I don't mean my aunt," she said, smiling, with perfect good-temper. "I know you have seen her, too. I mean my friend the artist, Mr. Thorne."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Otto. Had she been in the least degree less calmly self-possessed he might have found himself remonstrating on the dangers of philanthropy and of giving the rights of friendship to second-rate people, who were sure to take advantage of them. However, he contented himself with saying: "I didn't recognise him, somehow. No, I have not seen him this morning. Gone out sketching, I dare say. By-the-bye, from what you and Miss Latimer said last night, I suppose he is nothing great in the way of a painter?"

"He has not gone very far yet," said Poppy; and she found her instinct of defending Geoffrey suddenly at war with her honest convictions. "He loves art, and knows a great deal. As to his work, I am really not a judge, nor is Aunt Fanny. But success is not out of reach for a man who really cares and means to succeed. That is the great secret; don't you think so?"

"My dear Miss Latimer," said Otto, like an ancient oracle, "I have never believed in the sageness of that sage who defined genius as 'an infinite capacity for taking pains.' It is one of those modern doctrines which have flooded the world with bad work. Genius and pains have nothing on earth to do with each other, and generally exist—in this sense of pains—in totally different people. It is seldom genius that takes pains, and the man who takes pains is seldom a genius. Once, somebody mourned to me over a friend who could write and wouldn't. I pointed to the far sadder and commoner spectacle of men who can't write and will, I'm afraid it is the same with painting, do you know."

"You don't believe in work, then," said Poppy; "the work of a life?"

"Indeed I do. But in imaginative art, like painting or poetry or music, I deny that work without genius can produce any high success. Together, of course, they can do anything. Work is the hand of genius. Genius can do little without work. But work without genius can only grope in the dark and crawl in the mud. That's it. Genius is light and wings. But I never saw it defined to satisfy me; and no wonder, for we only know it by meeting it, and it is a rare encounter."

"When you meet it, how do you know it?" said Poppy.

"The answer to that is as hard as the definition. It seizes me—*c'est plus fort que moi*. I do know it."

"Naturally, do you think? Does every one?"

"Certainly not always. Only trained minds, consciously. But unconsciously, with certain kinds of genius, yes. The worst of a trained mind is that it is too apt to bring its own ready-made theories. It requires a high cultivation to trust one's own instincts."

"I should like to know how far I might trust mine," said Poppy thoughtfully.

"A good long way, I should think. Do you mean with regard to Mr. Thorne's pictures?"

"Yes; I was thinking of them."

"I feel so convinced that they are bad," Otto said quietly, "that I wish you could bring yourself to discourage instead of encouraging him."

"Mr. Nugent, why do you feel convinced that they are bad?"

"First, from your doubtful tone; second, from the young man's own appearance. He is not original."

"He loves his art and he works hard," said Poppy.

Otto smiled.

"We have already decided that that doesn't signify much," he said.

They had been walking up and down the terrace, Otto rather pleased at this opportunity of talking to her and at her tone in speaking of the artist. She was not so foolish after all, he thought, beginning to understand Poppy. Her friendship, as she called it, seemed to be little more than the patronage which some women think it necessary to bestow on any form of art which approaches them.

Now the smiling and impatient face of Miss Fanny Latimer appeared behind the glass doors of the dining-room, and they went in to join her.

After luncheon, Otto went off for a walk, planning to be back in time to meet the six o'clock boat. Poppy sat with her aunt for some time and wrote a letter to her friend Maggie Farrant, in which, among the interesting things of Herzheim, she mentioned Mr. Geoffrey Thorne, the artist, and his picturesque studio overhanging the churchyard wall. "It was nice," she said, "to meet a little bit of home so far away."

When her letter was finished she took it with her aunt's to the post-office, and came lingering back across the quaint bridge that crosses the rushing green river, stopping to look at the old silver in a corner window that hangs perilously over the water, slowly climbing the hill and turning into the irregular street, its roadway deep-sunk between the dark shady arcades along which the foot pavements run.

Miss Latimer was never quite happy that her niece should go about alone. Poppy, on the other hand, would not endure the company of a maid, and had the most supreme confidence—which, indeed, her aunt could not help sharing—in her own power of taking care of herself. There was, in fact, especially when alone among strangers, a stately unapproachableness in Poppy's height and bearing, and a perfection of fair calm dignity in her face, which guarded her as well as a regiment of aunts and maids. And Poppy had all the fearlessness of that French Duchess who only answered, "Qui? Moi?" when they told her that she would certainly be insulted if she went into some parts of Paris alone.

The truth was, that few amusements pleased Poppy better, with her grave

manner and in her plainly-cut clothes, than to poke about alone among the quaintest and oldest streets of quaint old towns abroad, and to come home laden with old china, old needlework, old books and prints, or, better still, any rubbish characteristic of the place. On this special afternoon she crossed the broad calm sunshine from the bridge, and went slowly up in the shadow of the dark arcade, till she came to one of the little shops full of cheap pottery belonging to Herzheim. Here a long talk with a very little girl and a very old woman resulted in at least two dozen specimens being put aside for the foreign customer, into whose fair face and soft grey eyes the sellers looked up with admiration equal to their pleasure. Perhaps it takes a good deal of beauty to touch the heart and the appreciation of a German-Swiss. Perhaps it is because they look on the English as nothing but walking purses, that it is often difficult to make a spark of human sympathy shine in their dull and business-like eyes. Anyhow, the little girl at the pottery-shop ran down the street that afternoon and talked to her companions of the beautiful English lady; and the old woman told her gossips never to talk of white skins again, but if they wanted to see one to go up to the "Blumenhof" with this basket of little pots, and ask to see Mademoiselle—what? "Latmer," or some name like that, not quite impossible.

When her shopping was done, Poppy went out of the street up a narrow paved lane which ended in a long, steep, winding flight of steps between rugged white walls overrun and festooned here, as everywhere at Herzheim, with trailing scarlet creeper. This mounting way led her into the precincts of the Castle. If she wished to go back to the "Blumenhof," she had nothing to do but to keep straight on, follow some steps and a stony lane downhill, and thus find herself almost immediately in the narrow side road that led to the hotel. To the left of where she stood, through low archways, ran the path leading into the churchyard and round to that turreted corner on which Geoffrey's studio window looked down.

Poppy was not very sure of these ways; but she stood still and looked round her, breathing a little quickly after a rather hurried climb up the long steps. Her eyes were attracted by another archway, through which a flood of soft yellow sunshine was pouring. Within it, lit up by

the gentle western glow, she seemed to see a procession of quaint figures in pale, dream-like colour on the wall. This was something, an old-world corner of Herzheim, which she had not seen before. She walked straight out of the paved court into what looked like a little treasure-house of sunshine, and found herself in the western porch of the church, low, square, and bordered with white arches, two of which opened straight on the brilliant sky and the mountains, with a foreground of red, curly-tiled roofs below in the hollow, and the murmur of the town coming up softly and musically mingled with the rushing of the unseen river.

Poppy recognised the original of one of Geoffrey's sunset sketches; but how far, far more beautiful! The two open arches had low stone sills, worn hollow with age, the rather dangerous play-place of generations of young Herzheimers. Poppy sat down in one of these, in the full warm light from the west, which was so dazzling that she presently turned her head away and looked from beautiful nature to the work of man in the porch, which the most mediæval-minded person could scarcely have called beautiful. But it was certainly strange. Long before Herzheim was Protestant, when the church doors, now locked from morning till night, used to stand open, and grand music used to roll out across the red roofs and the lake, and gorgeous processions used to march up and down those white lanes and flights of steps, now only trodden once a week by the black-coated townspeople on their way to a long, stiff service or a stroll in the high churchyard; before the days of whitewash, inside the church or out, some religious-minded painter had treated these low walls and this vaulted roof, built on purpose for him, as a casket to hold jewels of colour, and had painted there the chief objects of his faith, an easy lesson to be learnt on the way into church. Wind and weather, neglect and whitewash, had done their worst, and of some of his devotional figures not much but an outline was left. But the great subjects that had occupied him could be easily traced—the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi, the Crucifixion, solemn and shadowy with stately saints waiting by, Saint Margaret with the dragon, Saint Catherine and her wheel, Saint Lucy and her lamp, and a fourth no longer to be recognised. One of the four great frescoed subjects was also destroyed, and of the emblems of the Evangelists,

each in his own corner, only the great eagle of Saint John was left unwhitewashed.

There would have been something awful in the fixed gaze of those stiff and solemn faces, more effective still because half faded away, and seeming to suggest that the eyes of a whole ancient spiritual world were riveted on the opening life of one happy English girl, if it had not been for the sunshine, the deepening colour and clearness as evening drew on, the beauty and cheerfulness of all that outside world; pigeons fluttering past with wings that shone and flashed softly, and settling for a moment with gentle murmurs on roof or chimney just below; merry laughter of children from the town; and now, unnoticed of Poppy, the shrill whistle of a steamer. But the lower the sun sank, the straighter he shone into the porch, and the more vivid became the life of those watching faces. Poppy watched them back with a sort of fascination. It did not occur to her to move away, for this seemed to her the most beautiful spot in the town. Through a low archway leading into the churchyard she saw green lanes and flowers, all beginning to glow with that deep brilliancy which every moment was filling the air. She was hardly thinking, only enjoying quite vaguely, almost foolishly for a woman who had the character of being matter-of-fact. It was all a new world, and she liked being alone in it, without Aunt Fanny's cheerful remarks. She had an idea that this was a fine opportunity for thinking about life and making good resolutions. Those faces, the embodiment of such old beliefs, seemed to give life a wider meaning, too. They had much in them to trouble a modern mind. For instance, they were the faces of martyrs. Perhaps, Poppy thought, hovering vaguely about a great truth, no one but a martyr is really worth a great deal, either in this world or another. "I should like to be a martyr," she said half aloud, looking up at Saint Margaret and smiling; "but there is no chance for me."

At that moment, just as the sun was setting, the church clock was chiming, the gold light that filled the porch shone in its richest, deepest glory, Poppy found herself no longer alone. She heard footsteps and Otto Nugent's voice at the same moment. Turning her head, with the thought that Geoffrey Thorne might be with him, she was surprised and puzzled by meeting the extremely handsome,

sleepy, good-humoured eyes of a tall young man—a stranger—fixed on her with a vividness of curiosity which was almost startling.

"My brother, Miss Latimer. What a beautiful place you have found!" said Otto pleasantly.

ARMY COOKERY.

To any who have made the acquaintance of the British army at home or abroad, it must have been evident that the daily fare of the private soldier was lacking very much in variety and comfort. The raw material might be fairly good; the pound of flesh duly weighed out with not too much bone, or more than a fair amount of sinew; the daily accompanying pound of "ammunition" bread might be wholesome if not appetising, and the private's own contribution to the mess fund might be expended in a profitable way, to procure a sufficient supply of pepper, salt, and vinegar, with mustard, of course; and those popular vegetables, potatoes and onions, might appear in their season, which season is happily all the year round. But the result, as it appeared on the soldiers' bare, if well-scrubbed table, was not what would be called in the language of the day a proper square meal. Fair enough in quantity and quality, it required the finishing touch of good cookery.

It used to be said that the soldier liked his meat thus spoiled—sodden if boiled, and if baked well burnt and dried, and that he despised soups and "messes"; and this may have been pretty true of the case-hardened, long service soldier of other days; but it is certainly not true of the young soldier of the present day, who is little more than a growing boy when he first joins the ranks, and whose physique requires careful building up with good food and good cookery if he is ever to do you any credit as a soldier. An ill-cooked dinner suggests a visit to the canteen for a drink as a natural consequence, while a savoury meal offers no such provocation to thirst.

Curious it is to note the difference between the two services in the matter. In a general way, the naval officer lives on board ship in a plainer and less luxurious way than the military man at his mess, and the solid comfort and plenty of the sergeants' mess in a good regiment is probably superior to anything attained by warrant

officers afloat. But with Jack himself it is quite different. The good soups, the savoury stews, the satisfying dumplings are all good in their way, and the perfumes between deck when dinner is under weigh are often such as to set the appetite on edge. No such delightful savours are to be met with in the bare barrack-rooms, or about the huts and tents of the military camp. All this may be due to the fact that the sailor has inherited the traditions of helpfulness and handiness, so long the characteristics of the man-o'-war's man. The sailor's mess is composed of experts, who themselves are capable of taking the cook's place in their turn, and they have something to say in the management of the affair. But Thomas Atkins has rarely the chance of showing his handy qualities, even if he possesses them. The soldier, too, has been unlucky in being generally provided for "by contract." We know what that meant in the days of Queen Anne, when the soldier's bread and meat, and everything he wore and used, paid toll to the Commander-in-Chief, and after him to who can say how many ranks of grasping officials? In the great Peninsular War, Wellington looked after matters sharply enough; yet contractors grew rich, and immense fortunes were made here and there, while the men often marched and fought on deficient rations of mouldy biscuits and the saltiest of salt horse. Even in the Crimean campaign, when, after the privations of the first dreary winter, every effort was made to supply the soldier with comforts and even luxuries, habit and routine interfered with the benefits intended, and the soldier's daily fare was but little improved.

Those who shared in the latter campaign may remember the great Alexis Soyer's visit to the camp, a portly, genial figure in kepi and neat grey uniform, as he rode about with the air of a general officer of gastronomy. But even the buoyant and sanguine Alexis owned himself discouraged by the stolid indifference of the British private to the niceties of the cuisine. Soyer, indeed, in his efforts to popularise good cookery, came half a generation too early; yet his deeds live after him, and it is pleasant to find after all these years that Soyer's "stock-pot" is coming into recognition as a primary requisite in the army kitchen.

For in the army, as elsewhere, the master cook has been abroad—elsewhere more correctly the mistress cook, for it is chiefly to the female professors of the art

that the recent revival in the culinary world is due; but in the army the man cook is a necessity, and does not suggest any notions of luxury and expense. An excellent School of Cookery has been established at Aldershot, where the art is studied in its relation to service in barracks, in camp, and in flying column. Naturally the aim is to teach the soldier how to do his best with the appliances that are at the disposal of an army in the field. As regards the "batterie de cuisine," such appliances are simple enough. A few huge ladles, such as Bumble might have used for the workhouse skilly, a trident to harpoon the joint that is swimming in the big pot, a chopper, a few knives, and a nest of camp kettles complete the equipment. But as well as these, as an official memorandum points out, "the following articles are required in addition to those provided at the public expense, namely: Paste-board and rolling-pin at the rate of four per battalion; skimmer, one per company; saucepan, one per corps who have means available for using such, for making gravy." A keen observer writing about soldiers in an early number of "Household Words"—1851—remarks in effect, "There is no such thing as a saucepan, and dinner is cooked in a copper." Now that reproach is removed—at the expense of the men's contributions; but only in the case, it will be observed, of a corps who have means available for using it.

But although the official memorandum in its rigid departmental phraseology has often a faintly humorous flavour, there are excellent practical hints to be met with, and the motto of the soldiers' kitchen, "Skin, simmer, and scour," is one that might be adopted by more pretentious establishments, and hold its place with Miss Edgeworth's "Waste not, want not," as a text over the kitchen chimney-shelf.

Yet instructive as are the departmental memoranda, a little oral explanation will give us a more lively idea of the actual messing of the rank and file of a regiment up to date. And here is a smart young corporal who has passed the school, his scarlet tunic protected by a great white apron, and the white "bonnet" of the chef replacing the martial headpiece. Said the corporal:

"This is the way of it. Each company has its colour-sergeant, who looks after the messing of the company. At the end of every week the sergeant prepares a form showing what the company is to eat

for each of the seven days following. Here is the form with a column for each day of the week, and a line each for breakfast, dinner, and tea. Below is a list of the various dishes that can be had, and the more change there is the better. Now on Monday, suppose we say, breakfast, brawn or a kipper; dinner, pea soup, roast meat and Yorkshire, and rice pudding. Then next day you would have a stew for dinner—it might be brown or plain, or Irish or curried—no soup, but suet pudding; and on the following day you might have a meat pudding or a sea pie, and with that perhaps a raisin pudding or a jam roll. Then for breakfast and tea there's choice of porridge, cheese, liver and bacon, eggs, rissoles, your bloater or your haddock, as well as your brawn, which is a handsome dish at all times, and well liked.

"Well, when the weekly bill has been signed by the commanding officer, it comes to the sergeant cook of the regiment, who draws the meat and bread from the commissariat stores or the contractors, as the case may be, and he has to arrange the supply of meat accordingly, keeping joints for the baking or roasting companies, and pieces for the stewing companies. Now the Government ration, as you know, is a pound of bread and a pound of meat a day straight—nothing else, not even a pinch of salt. For all the other stores the colour-sergeant has to cater with the company's money—three-pence a day, that is, stopped from each soldier's pay. He buys the vegetables and all the etceteras, and each company has its locker in the cook-house where they are kept."

Now we will suppose the cook-house fires lighted, the ovens baking, the coppers boiling—or rather simmering, if you please, according to regulation—and we will ask the composition of what is getting ready for No. 5 Company. That, too, is according to regulation. Here is the official receipt. Ingredients required for sixty men:

Brown stew, mixed vegetables, six pounds; onions, three pounds; flour, one pound; pepper, one and a half ounce; salt, three ounces; and the meat, of course not the full sixty pounds, for the assistant cook has taken out the bones.

"And about the bones," remarks the corporal, "there is a good deal to be said. You may have heard of Her Majesty's ships lying at anchor till they grounded on

their beefbones. Well, that wouldn't be allowed now, not in either of the services. The bones are carefully cut out and go into the stock-pot"—the gift of the great Soyer to the British soldier. "But not indiscriminately. No, the bones of each day are tied up in a net with a tally annexed, and each day they boil, or, rather, simmer in the pot for five or six hours. At the end of the third day they are taken out, and there is not much goodness left in them." Clearly not, from the specimen before us. Our old dog would feel insulted at the offer of such an article, fond as he is of bones. "But what comes out of the stock-pot when it is cold is a firm, nutritious jelly, and seasoned with salt and pepper, and with peas added, or lentils, or other vegetables, make capital soup, as you may believe."

While bones are one of the cardinal points in the new army cookery, dripping is a second and even more important item. "You would hardly credit, sir," says the intelligent corporal, "what a difference the scientific treatment of dripping has made in the soldiers' messing. Formerly dripping would be bought for making pies and puddings, and could not often be got with the mess-money; but now, under the new system, there is sufficient for all the pastry and things required, and some left to sell. And the secret of this is constant skimming of soups and stews, taking care of the dripping from roast and baked meats, and cutting off all superfluous fat before cooking and 'rendering it down.' Why, the value of three months' dripping in an average infantry battalion, calculated at the low rate of fourpence per pound, has been shown to amount to more than twenty-two pounds, all of which goes to improve the soldiers' fare, and which, under the former wasteful system, was actually chucked away."

All this is very good hearing, and it is pleasant to find that new methods and the Aldershot School of Cookery have so far improved Thomas Atkins's bill of fare; but when it comes to the clash of arms, then may perhaps cookery, like many other refinements, have to take a back seat. Let us see how our corporal is prepared for taking the field. Conceive your regimental cooking train set down in the midst of a windy common or in a stiff ploughed field. There are your camp kettles, your regulation ladles and chop-pers, and the transport waggon has luckily turned up with the day's meat supply and fuel; but for the rest you have a clear

field and nothing more, and seven hundred men waiting for their dinner.

But the corporal is not in the least flurried at the predicament he is in. With a flying column it would be simply an affair of digging so many kettle trenches, each with a funnel-shaped mouth, where the fire is built, and terminating in a low chimney built with sods. On the top of the trench are ranged the camp kettles, and the interstices filled in with sods and clay, or anything handy. Where there is only loose sand, or on hard, rocky ground, a wall trench must be made, of parallel walls of loose stones, with the pots hanging from sticks placed across, and the fire built beneath. But with the prospect of less hurried movement, a "broad arrow kitchen" would be established—a more elaborate arrangement of trenches all leading to a central chimney, on the same principle as the flying column trench. On this could be cooked the dinners of seven hundred men; and it is only to be hoped that there will be seven hundred men there to eat them, for a battalion of that strength is rather a rare bird in these short service days. But the corporal would not be content with just stews and boils; he would establish a number of Aldershot ovens. And the receipt for making an Aldershot oven is as follows:

Take a barrel—a difficult thing, perhaps, in private life, but not so on the march, where "returned empties" are not insisted on. Having got your barrel, roll it to the place fixed up for your oven, cover it with earth; make a sort of tumulus of it, in fact, as if you were burying a warrior chief, but leave the front open where the head of the barrel has been knocked in. When you have got a good firm crust of earth about it—clay for choice, but the stiffest bit of soil, anyhow, to be found in the neighbourhood—set fire to the barrel. When the barrel is burnt up, the result should be a sort of cave, with a crust of baked earth about it tolerably smooth and firm. Make a good fire within, and when it burns low draw it out and put in your joints, and your pies, and whatever you may have to bake, and fill up the front with sods. If all has gone well, your batch will come out cooked to the best advantage. As to the chances of the top tumbling in, or the whole furnace collapsing upon the savoury baked meats and pies, the corporal thinks that there would be no room for such mishaps under his management.

Altogether, we may come to the conclusion that the condition of the soldier in respect of his daily food is much improved since the establishment of a school of cookery, and the adoption of common sense views with regard to cooking. It would still be desirable, one would think, to give the private a little more personal interest in the matter, and something in the way of choice. Nor would the bonds of discipline surely be unduly relaxed by giving the men some control over the quality of the supplies by means of a "mess committee" chosen by the soldiers themselves. If the Government gave an entirely free ration, there would be less reason for this, but as the soldier actually subscribes to his mess, there seems to be no sufficient reason why he should not have a voice in its management. There is no rank blasphemy about such a suggestion, anyhow. As it is, there is often a hidden current of dissatisfaction with things culinary which may sometimes flare out into open insubordination. Our corporal, indeed, will say nothing to the discredit of the butcher ware, on which his skill is exercised, except that it isn't quite equal to what a private gentleman expects to get from his butcher; and that "soldiers ought to have good teeth." It is a question, too, whether a little more elasticity in the matter of rations would not be advisable. A pound of meat a day is too much in the heats of summer, when meat, too, is often unavoidably tainted before it reaches the soldier's mess, and there should be the power of substituting other kinds of food more suited to the season.

But these are matters of organisation which have nothing directly to do with the question of cookery for the soldier. The great fact remains that the light of scientific cookery is gradually being diffused through the British army, and it may be hoped that the soldier's experience in such matters will be of service to him when he quits the ranks, and that when he finds a home of his own he will be able to live as well as he did when he was "with the regiment."

A PEEP AT VENEZUELA.

AT Trinidad—West Indian Trinidad, not Trinidad the treasure island—one hears a good deal about Venezuela in general and Caraccas in particular.

"Oh, you must go to Caraccas! Fine

old Spanish city, old Spanish life, splendid buildings, any amount of first-class hotels." "You mustn't miss the Caraccas railway; beats the St. Gothard into fits." "Of course you'll have a run over to Venezuela? You'll never repent it," and so forth. So we, in innocent belief that in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom, determined to go to Venezuela.

Before you get to Caraccas you must get to La Guayra; before getting to La Guayra there is a little sea voyage to be performed. Sometimes this sea voyage is unpleasant. When we went it was fine; we were told to be thankful for it. Arrived at La Guayra, the question arises, What came we out for to see? A line of rugged mountains, some of them tolerably well clothed with foliage, some of them bare, red, and unattractive, at the foot of them a straggling town of white houses with red roofs, clustered beneath an ancient fort, and terminating in a line of wharfs and warehouses.

The steamer is wharfed alongside the quay. This is a mercy deserving of thanks, for generally in West Indian waters the traveller, happy in the belief that he has arrived at his destination, discovers that he must make an extra voyage in a small boat. In the instance of Port of Spain, Trinidad, this voyage is about three miles; at Antigua it is nearer four.

The harbour is tolerably well filled with craft, and prominent among them is the Venezuelan Navy, consisting of an old-fashioned American gunboat, of about as much value as a means of offence as the old fort above the town is of defence. Her Majesty's ship "Comus" was here lately. Her name is not popular at La Guayra, for, during some difficulty concerning the Orinoco boundary, she came to keep an eye upon British interests, and received a peremptory order from the Governor of La Guayra to clear out within twenty-four hours or she would be fired upon. At the expiration of that time, instead of clearing out, she hove anchor, struck her topmasts, cleared her decks for action, ran out her guns, and came closer in. Whereupon the valiant La Guayrans, in the full belief that a few minutes would see their town in ruins, packed up and fled to the mountains in most undignified precipitation.

It was Sunday morning when we arrived. We were the only passengers, and we fondly believed that in order to inspect our solitary portmanteau the custom house

officer might be induced to forget the sacredness of the day and accommodate us. But we deceived ourselves, and had to face the fact of a Sunday at La Guayra.

We went into the town, being duly warned that Englishmen were not in much favour. In fact, the first thing we saw was a drinking-shop sign representing a dusky damsel, imperfectly clothed, cuddling a flag and addressing a sandy-whiskered gentleman in a sun-hat and top-boots, in the words: "Mister! Yo no sera tuyo! Jamas! Jamas! Jamas!" which, being interpreted, is: "Mister! I will never be yours! Never! Never! Never!"

La Guayra is soon described. Narrow streets of one-storey houses, of which the apertures which serve as windows are closely barred, in the fashion of old Spain; narrow footways and carriage tracks made of uneven boulders; smells innumerable; lounging and spitting men; women with mantillas, and even then ugly; dirt indescribable; drinking shops; restaurants; a couple of poor little tree-planted squares; a railway station; and a mass of warehouses and public offices.

We see all this in half an hour, and we have a long day to kill. There is a cock-fighting pit. The proprietor entreats us to enter. We obey. The place is crammed with smoking, expectorating, gesticulating, shrieking men in shirt-sleeves. A couple of wretched cocks are put into the arena. They have not the slightest desire to fight; but they have to.

With much wile and artifice they are induced to quarrel. They fly at each other in the air several times in succession, and after each flight the fall of a bunch of feathers proves that they must have struck each other. After some minutes, one gives the other a kick or a peck which knocks him out of time. Frantic excitement amongst the spectators and much interchange of coin of the realm.

Poor sport, we think, and walk out. But La Guayra is one of the hottest places in a very hot part of the world, so that when we had seen the cathedral—which in no way differs from hundreds of Roman Catholic cathedrals elsewhere—and had "assisted" at the departure of the Caraccas train, we felt we had done enough, and returned to our steamer.

There are some stirring old memories connected with La Guayra, prominently those which Kingsley describes in "Westward Ho!" Later on, in 1739, we made a mess in attacking it; and the town fort

which so effectively contributed to our repulse and knocked the "Stafford" about so much, was probably that which now grins with toothless mouth over the town. In 1743, Admiral Knowles fared no better against this then "large and handsome town," the ships engaged suffering severely and being obliged to cut their cables and run for it, whilst not a few growls about treachery and cowardice were heard.

We were off to Caraccas the next morning. The railway runs through the town, then through a cocoa-nut palm plantation, and then, with a sharp turn inland, commences the ascent of the mountains. It is a stupendous piece of work, and well worthy of its rank amongst the triumphs of engineering, for the obstacles in the way of its construction were very great, and two—landslips and locusts—are insuperable. But when it is compared with the St. Gothard or the Mont Cenis, from a scenic point of view, sheer nonsense is talked. Wonderful it is as it zigzags up the mountain sides and crawls along the brows of terrible precipices; but from beginning to end there is not a "bit" which is worth transferring to paper. Between La Guayra and Caraccas—twenty-one miles by rail, but only nine as the crow flies—there are half-a-dozen stations, by which is not to be understood that there are half-a-dozen towns or villages, for there are not; but the train pulls up at mere shanties, and whilst the engine takes in water the passengers alight and refresh themselves with warm pasties and neat brandy.

We had a party of Venezuelan girls next to us. The amount of brandy which they absorbed between La Guayra and Caraccas only astonished us a little more than the amount of paint and powder with which they had masked their bold and exceedingly plain faces.

The descent from the highest point of the mountains is very steep, and the downward progress of the train makes a great many people feel nervous; but there has never yet been an accident to a passenger train. The line runs through the wildest and most repellent of mountain solitudes, the bare, sun-blistered rocks of which are rarely relieved by foliage or vegetation save a scrubby growth of cactus. The only evidence of human life is the ancient mule track, the course of which the line follows pretty closely. This is dotted with long processions of mules, trudging along under the blazing sun, as mules have done along this track probably ever since

the first Spanish colonisation of Venezuela. The muleteers are a strangely stupid race, and are not to be persuaded that it is their business to get out of the way of the train, not the train's business to give way to them. Consequently a large number of mules are run over every year.

So far we have been disappointed. La Guayra is a wretched hole. The railway is wonderful, but utterly unpicturesque. So we anxiously look forward to Caraccas, that fine old Spanish New World city, about which we—whose minds are full of the Spanish Main, and the Buccaneers, and the Filibusters—have woven a web of stirring romance. I know the picture I had formed was that of a grand old grey-walled place, serenely basking in the light of its ancient glory, full of odd, twisting streets with carved doorways giving peeps into little tree-planted, fountain-adorned courts, with grand old dusky churches full of priceless pictures and relics, and large shady squares where picturesque crowds strolled and lounged, upon which looked the palaces of long-dead grandees. The picture was distinctly before me, and the more I heard at Trinidad and elsewhere about Caraccas, the more was I justified in believing that for once in my travels the real would fulfil the ideal, and that no such disillusion would greet me as I had faced in Rome, in Tokio, and elsewhere.

In two hours' time after leaving La Guayra we were being tossed and jolted along an uneven and dusty street of the "fine old Spanish city."

"I—I don't think much of it as yet," sighed one of us, looking forth on to squalid, red-tiled houses, own brothers to those at La Guayra.

"Oh, but you must never judge of a place by the neighbourhood of its railway station," replied another, but, it must be confessed, in not a whit more cheerful a voice.

Then there was silence until we rattled up to the door of the Gran Hotel. We paid the driver's exorbitant fare, and asked for quarters. All we could have was a miserable, half-lighted room, opening on to a sort of court, in the midst of which was the mouth of a drain, and for this and our board the charge would be merely twelve and a half francs a day.

Caraccas is a large and prosperous city. There is nothing ancient and nothing romantic in it from end to end. Nor, to compensate for the disillusion on the score

of romance and antiquity, is it an interesting or magnificent new city. It is not a particularly healthy city, for, although one escapes the blazing, breathless heat of La Guayra, the wind towards evening is as bitter as the mistral of the Riviera, and the dust is as bad as that of Kingston, Jamaica.

The cost of living there must be tremendous, if we may be allowed to take as a basis the price of the cheapest decent cigar, which is fifteenpence, and of an afternoon's carriage drive, which is two pounds sterling.

The Government buildings will be very handsome when they are finished, and close to them is rather a quaint old University. Besides these, and one or two fine squares, there is absolutely nothing to interest the stranger. Some of the shops are good, especially the jewellers' and confectioners', for the prevailing influence is French; for the rest, take a few large, bare churches, and dot them about long, narrow, straight streets of one-storey houses, with heavily-barred window openings, the most remarkable features of which are the absence of glass and chimneys.

But let us give Caraccas its due. It is an intensely amusing place.

A Venezuelan regiment passed the hotel. It was composed of men and boys of all ages, shapes, and sizes. They were clad in every variety of slop which could be twisted into the semblance of an uniform. Some wore boots, some wore the native canvas sandal, some wore nothing. Some had regulation "képis," some had handkerchiefs tied round their heads. Each man followed his own inclination as to marching and as to the mode of carrying his rifle. Some men had rifles and no bayonets, some had bayonets and no rifles. Needless to say that both rifles and bayonets were brown with rust. All were smoking. When they halted and formed into line it was with the precision of an infant school.

We were told that before leaving Caraccas it was our duty as good tourists to go to the Iron Bridge, the fashionable resort of Caraccas, and to the Calvario.

The Iron Bridge spans a river just out of the city. The "jeunesse dorée" of Caraccas was taking its daily recreation. This is what it was:

Your young gentleman, having attired himself becomingly, calls on a friend, and together they take a carriage. They light

cigars, supply the driver with one, settle themselves in attitudes presumably indicative of life-long intimacy with boundless wealth, and drive through the streets and over the Iron Bridge.

At the further end of the bridge are restaurants, or rather drinking booths. When a carriage approaches, attendants rush out and take the orders of its occupants. They do not wait to see if the carriage stops; it is not a question as to whether its occupants require refreshments or not, for every carriage pulls up at one of the booths as regularly as at a toll bar. Syrups or glasses of spirits are brought out, and the driver takes his glass in the matter-of-course style befitting a Republic. The carriage continues its way, not for a long drive into the country, but just round the road which crosses the river again a few hundred yards lower down, and brings them back to the Iron Bridge and the drinking booths.

How many times fashion ordains that this little circular tour should be made I know not; but we saw that more than one carriage made it three times, and that the severity of the exercise required a consumption of refreshments at the end of each turn.

Of a more active and daring disposition were the riders. But what riding!

The really beautiful ponies never went beyond an amble—an amble so gentle that the rider hardly moved. He is splendidly attired. The caparisons and housings of his steed are gorgeous. He has big Mexican stirrups, and a long, lasso-like arrangement in the place of a whip; but why does he put his bright spurs on to shoes, so that a more or less dusky bit of stocking peeps between shoe-top and trouser?

What a training for the youth of a nation, we thought! Small wonder that a masculine man in Caracas is a rare sight; that the local youth are sallow and spotty, with narrow shoulders, and concave chests, and legs like whip-handles! Why, ten minutes at a cricket net or with a pair of sculls would exhaust the best of them for a week, and ten minutes of football would kill him.

We must say a good word for the Calvario. It is a hill which is being turned into a sort of recreation ground of the public garden type. The ascent is hot and dusty; the flower-beds are but in embryo, and the shrubberies are but half grown. But it promises to be an ornamental acquisition to the town.

On the summit there used to be a statue of Guzman Blanco, President of the Republic. Guzman, although he was careful to line his own pockets well, was a great benefactor to Caracas; but he was turned out of office, and so his statue has been toppled down after him, and his name and initials erased from all public works. From the foundation on which the statue stood rather a fine panorama of the city and the surrounding country is obtainable.

Disappointed and disgusted with Caracas, we resolved to fly at the first opportunity. But whither? The next West Indian steamer was not due at La Guayra for a week. We heard of a watering-place about four miles from La Guayra called Macuto. To Macuto we resolved to go. It could not be worse than La Guayra or Caracas, and, being termed a "watering-place," might be better. So we recrossed the mountains, and a steam tram carried us along the coast to Macuto.

Macuto is beautifully situated amidst palm-trees at the foot of the Caracas Mountains, which are here, not red and bare as at La Guayra, but clothed with dense foliage, and are split up into romantic ravines down which tumble clear, cold streams to the sea. Nature has done everything to make the place attractive; man has done little or nothing to back her up, and so, for the want of a little enterprise and energy, what might be a really pleasant seaside resort is lifeless and depressing.

Some years back a rich man thought he would enjoy his "otium cum dignitate" on the banks of the little river which dashes down from the hills to the sea. So he started to build a magnificent villa. Unfortunately his funds gave out, the building operations were suspended, and there the villa, or rather the costly skeleton of it, remains. Close to it a company started a fresh-water bathing establishment on a grand scale. This failed, so there is the villa, which is admirably adapted for an hotel, and the baths—all waiting to be thrown into one concern.

"Why waiting?" we ask. "Because," is the reply, "in this, the most flourishing state in South America, no man knows what the morrow may bring forth. To-day is peace; to-morrow all may be riot, and confusion, and anarchy. Who is going to embark upon speculative enterprises under these circumstances?"

There is an hotel at Macuto ; it is called the Casino. As a building it is well enough, although it is a pity that, instead of facing the sea, it looks upon a row of houses of the usual cheerful Venezuelan type. It has a fine open verandah, and a large central ball-room, and a pleasant little tree-planted and fountain-adorned court. But the bedrooms are small and barely furnished ; the beds are simply tightly stretched lengths of canvas ; there is no bath ; the cooking is abominable ; and the sanitary arrangements are of so repulsive a character as to be hardly realisable unless seen. To crown all, the owner is a man whose soul, being wrapped up in music, is very far above attention to the concerns of his property. However, in spite of this, we managed to pass a week away at Macuto pleasantly.

Bathing in the open sea is not deemed safe on account of sharks and barracoutas, but a slice of sea has been enclosed and formed into a bath, and although in a couple of strokes one can go from end to end of it, the fresh, salt waves break in refreshingly over the barrier at the end.

There are pleasant walks, too, up the mountain ravines, by the sides of the tumbling streams, in the midst of luxurious tropical vegetation ; but the atmosphere there being heavy and confined, we preferred the path along the shore, which is bold and rocky. The track, a relic of very old days, passes through villages and groves of mango and palm, and blood-red poinsettia and treacherous manchineel. The sun shines down from a cloudless sky through the arcade of branches overhead ; on the one hand, through gaps in the flower-laden thicket, we get glimpses of expanses of waving, glowing sugar-cane, with here and there a line of cocoa-nut palms bending their graceful heads to the breeze, with the sombre background of mountain, clothed in forest through much of which the foot of man has never passed. On the other hand, through the clumps of manchineel and seaside grape, the wind rushes fresh and strong from the sea, which bursts in magnificent waves upon the rock-strewn beach. Here there is much to remind us of Old Spain—the long trains of laden mules with their tinkling bells ; the picturesque figures of the muleteers ; caballeros, stiff and dignified on horseback ; wayside shrines, at which the faithful kneel ; wayside inns with rude verandahs of palm-leaves, beneath the shade of which women gossip and travellers drink sour wine poured

from goatskins ; mangy dogs and scarecrow chickens ; and, of course, swarms of children.

Most of the travellers we meet do not deign even to look at us, for we British are in ill odour hereabouts just now, but the negroes give us "Buenos dias !"

So we passed away the week. With what delight we got into the steam tram and rolled away to La Guayra need not be dwelt upon ; but our troubles were not quite over. We had already paid for the privilege of entering Venezuela ; we were now informed that we had to pay for the luxury of getting out of it. So during the entire morning we were occupied in paying fees and getting documents stamped and signed and sealed, and in dodging about from one stifling, highly-odoured office to another.

As a final worry, we found that the steamer, instead of being alongside the quay, was in mid-harbour, so that we were obliged to hire a boat, and, as there was a very nasty swell setting in, the trip was very unpleasant and not altogether devoid of danger.

At last we were on board the R. M. steamer "Solent." How sweet and fresh and clean everything looked ! How deliciously tasted that first meal ! With what ecstasy we settled ourselves in the cool, cleanly cabin !

We did not even trouble ourselves to take a farewell peep at Venezuela. We had had our peep, and as we steamed swiftly away in the direction of Trinidad, we resolved that it should be through no recommendation of ours that any innocent traveller should be beguiled away from Charles Kingsley's *Earthly Paradise*, Trinidad, to see, at any rate, that part of Venezuela in which is situated the "fine old Spanish city of Caraccas."

WHITE CAMELLIAS.

WHITER than any whitest rose,
And cold as lone, untrodden snows

On far-off mountain-peak,
I hold the blossom in my hand ;
In language I can understand,
Its waxen petals speak.

She dropped it, moving through the dance,
With cold, slight smile, and steady glance
Of clear, far-seeing eyes ;
It fell full softly at my feet ;
With eager eye and heart a-beat
I stooped to grasp the prize.

The guests have vanished one by one,
The lights are quenched, the music done,
And I sit here apart.

Now, wherefore am I sad to-night ?
I had my fill of proud delight,
What ails thee, O my heart ?

What ails thee thus to make a moan,
 Since I have won her for my own,
 Henceforth to have and hold?
 Hath she not beauty for a dower?
 Is she not perfect as this flower?
 Yea—but the flower is cold.

Is she not white as angels are,
 Smiling like some fair lonely star
 At life's bewilderment?
 Breathing, apart from common cares,
 Like this white flower, exotic airs?
 Yea—but the flower lacks scent.

I love her, and she is mine own,
 Yet, as I sit to-night alone,
 Some subtle joy I miss;
 Upon her truth I rest secure,
 Her heart is proud, her soul is pure,
 But where is love's fond bliss?

If I should sorrow, would she creep
 Into my arms and softly weep
 Till I was comforted?
 If I fell fainting by the way,
 Would she find words of hope to say,
 And raise my drooping head?

If I should sin, would she draw near
 In her white robes, and own me dear
 In wrong as well as right?
 Would she sit with me in the dust
 Of shame, and speak with love's own trust,
 Of noonday after night?

I know not. I—how should I know?
 I think Heaven fashioned her of snow,
 So pure she is, so cold;
 Her life seems rounded hour by hour,
 Compact as this pale, scentless flower,
 Complete without love's gold,
 Complete without love's sweet perfume.
 The shadows lighten in the room,
 And morn is breaking grey.
 I lay the blossom out of sight;
 What cometh, anguish or delight,
 With life's swift-dawning day?

MY FRIENDLY JAP.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

WHAT I did was to go back to my room and shut myself in for the night, resolving that I would face the problem fairly and squarely. Had I not better intimate to the young lady herself firmly, but at the same time delicately, that—what—what, indeed, was I to say?

Ought I to tell her that I was no longer to be trusted; that, now that my pet dog theory was destroyed, it was no longer seemly, nor indeed safe, for us to continue our present unconventional relations? No, that would never do. I felt I could never even begin. Yet, fancy if by any chance our intimacy were to be misconstrued as Englefield had suggested, and some, if not all, of those darker possibilities were to ensue! I had not cared to own it to Englefield, but already I had both seen and heard quite enough of Japanese ideas of justice, of their contempt for human life, and of their summary methods of revenge, to cause me to

entertain considerable qualms as to the result.

However, there was no harm done as yet; so for the time I gave the problem up and went to sleep.

In the morning, by the light of another day, the outlook was entirely changed. The sun was bright, the air fresh, and I could laugh at Englefield and his premonishment of woe. He must surely have been funning, and I—had taken him seriously. The whole affair was too ridiculous altogether, from my initial blunder down to his most Cassandra-like forecasts of the night before. Still, one might as well be careful. There might be something in what he had said as to the girl's relations. With regard to herself, there was nothing, absolutely, to fear. She was such a child; a frank, affectionate child, with an unconventional style of manifesting her regard which, now I remembered it, caused me to blush for my stupidity.

I next wondered if she could be as young as I had always thought. Might not much of her supposed childlikeness arise from that characteristic lightness of heart so peculiar to her race, and from the enforced simplicity of her language? A vocabulary restricted to the simplest words in sentences modelled on those of "The Child's First Reader," might easily prove misleading by obscuring any underlying maturity of thought. Poor little Fido! How could I possibly warn her without hurting her feelings? Yet something must be done. It was one thing to have had a supposed child, and that child a boy, always at hand to minister to one's more material wants, or amuse one with his naïve and irresponsible chatter; but a full-grown girl was different entirely, and it must not be allowed to go on. Still, it was a pity, for we had entertained each other wonderfully well, and were getting on so fast with each other's language; but this discovery made all the difference in the world, and somehow I should have to warn her to keep away.

But where was she? Always it had been her habit to wait on me at breakfast herself, whereas now, though all was laid ready, there was no Fido to smile and coo pleasantly round me and invite me to partake.

No, there was no Fido on that day nor yet the next, and in spite of my severely virtuous mood, I began to miss her—to wish that at least she had waited to be told. But here she had taken the initiative, and I had to eat my meals alone.

She was not ill, for I had caught sight of her flitting about the garden; then what could it mean, this sudden and voluntary change in all our habits? Could she, by any chance, have overheard what Englefield had said, and how I—— But here my ears tingled again as I thought of my almost inconceivable stupidity. How she and her friends would laugh, thought I, more sensitively alive to the possibility of their ridicule than even the chaff of my English friends.

But she did not laugh when we met face to face next day. Rather did she look at me shyly and askance, with the deprecatory appeal of a pet spaniel in disgrace, and I was obliged to take her by the hand, else she would have slipped away.

We were in the garden, and she stood there, a not unpleasing picture, in her quaint dress, leaning against an intricate and elaborately carved trellis, with a superb giant azalea by way of background. Then, too, there was a suspicious moisture about her eyes, and she looked so entirely changed from the light-hearted, seeming child of a few days before, that more and more did I marvel at myself. Nor would she say what had kept her away, until, aided by a chance word, I found quite as I feared that she had overheard and understood the most of what Englefield and I had said; had heard, therefore, my own strenuous disclaimers of all interest in her except as a distraction and an amusing companion; and her pride had been sorely hurt, and——

But there, what was I to do? She had been so consistently kind, that I could but try to soothe her and assure her how entirely she was mistaken, and in face of her undisguised delight and restored self-respect, beg of her—spite of all my admonisher had said—to resume our old manner of life.

But it was not the same. Try as I would, the old perfect simplicity and entire unconsciousness was lost, and could not be restored. Englefield's words were constantly recurring to me and sounding the death-knell, one by one, of all our old relations. I was restless, uneasy, nor able to justify myself in permitting little familiarities, innocent enough before, but now so altogether changed. No, the serpent had entered our paradise, and no longer was this right, while the constraint I felt reflected itself in Fido, whose smile soon grew less spontaneous and more rare, to presently die away altogether.

The trouble came about in this wise.

My host, after the custom of Japan, had arranged a marriage for his daughter with a young man of her own class—a warrior and a wearer of the double-handed sword. But she, far from falling in with his plans after the docile fashion of her race, had first temporised, and then flatly refused the proposed alliance altogether. Whereupon there arose a tremendous pother and pow-wow. Such insubordination was most unusual, hence was the excitement proportionately great. The fair one was obdurate, and the parents, at first perplexed, became eventually stern and peremptory under a provocation so rare as to be well-nigh unprecedented.

It is quite conceivable that after a struggle more or less prolonged, matters might have arranged themselves, and the affair have been quietly adjusted, had not a letter I received from home served unfortunately to precipitate the crisis.

The summons was both urgent and unexpected. I was called away, and was obliged forthwith to break the news of my impending departure to my host and his daughter, and then it was that the mischief first began.

With my room all in confusion—I was busy packing—and a medley of trunks and portmanteaux and their intended contents covering the floor from end to side, I was interrupted by a visitor—Fido herself.

That she had been weeping was only too clear. Too deeply moved for concealment or pretence, she laid her hand on my arm to say:

"You—you go away?"

"Yes," I answered, "I am obliged to go;" to be startled by the prompt rejoinder:

"Yes, yes; I go too. You take me with you."

"But—your father!" I stammered, aghast before the suddenness of the emergency. "He will object—will not let you go."

"No—he not willing; but I go, allee same."

"But your family, your friends. It is a long, long way. Just think what would you do—so far away, and alone among strangers?"

"Not all strange. I go with you."

"But—I cannot take you. You—you cannot live with me. It would not be——" But here I stopped, painfully conscious of my dilemma. How was I to make her understand—about propriety, and Mrs. Grundy, and—yes, about Ellen,

who was waiting for me on the other side?

"Oh, yes—all right! I live with you. If you like, I be your servant; but no stay here when you are gone."

And the great salt tears trickled down the sides of her innocent little nose.

I felt dreadfully sorry and even more ashamed, though why I scarcely knew, for how was I to blame? Still, if I had known—but what in the world was I to do? How make her understand?

And while I hesitated, there entered the father, no longer smiling, but looking suspicious and annoyed.

He glanced from one to the other, at once irate and perplexed; then at the signs of imminent departure with very obvious relief.

"Ah!" he grunted. "You go away plenty quick!" thereby echoing his daughter's words; then added, "You not be here for the—the wedding."

I assented, adding that I should be far enough away before that auspicious event occurred, to which, however, I avoided more direct reference.

"Ah! fine time—fine man—fine—everything," and he rambled on, plainly talking "at" his rebellious daughter.

"Yes," I echoed. "It would be a very fine time, no doubt."

By way of diversion I took up a present I had already prepared, and begged his permission to offer it, English fashion, to the prospectively happy pair.

He took it for his daughter, who had slipped away, and thanked me gravely but without effusion. Then finding we were alone, he whispered:

"She too much young and plenty foolish. Not know what she want or what good; but marry—then soon all right."

With which sentiment, the wish being plainly father to the thought, I cordially agreed, and went on with my work.

The next scene in the little drama was very short, but I found it sufficiently dramatic, though I hardly realised its full import at the time.

Briefly, then, I had paid all my duty calls, had said my last "good-byes," and in a native "ricksha" was being hurried down to the boat, my luggage having already been sent on board.

I was just a little anxious about the time, having driven it rather fine, and finding our progress impeded by the crowd, I paid off my "Kuruma-san" in order to make my way by a short cut the last few yards on foot.

It would be a near thing, I knew, but I should manage it, I decided; and the little street—or rather passage—was so quiet that I almost ran along, to find myself the next moment face to face with a party of Japanese, whose appearance from a neighbouring doorway promptly barred my passage, while so sudden was our encounter that the drawn sword of the leader almost touched my breast before, half-mechanically, I sprang aside, scarcely noticing the friendly arm that had interposed to brush the keen-edged blade aside.

It was a narrow escape, and I was safely past them, and all was over before one could well have counted ten; and after a short run I jumped into the boat waiting for me at the quay-side, then turned to see what had become of my assailants. There they were still, all three of them, and—was it possible?—yes, there was the fourth—my saviour, who appeared to have thrown himself directly across their path and effectually prevented all pursuit. Himself, did I say? Well, I could not be altogether sure. And before I could look again, or satisfy the new doubt which, together with the reaction after my sudden excitement, had left me feeling rather faint and sick, the men had pushed off, and I was being helped up the steamer's side.

Was it indeed "Fido," my friendly Jap, faithful to the last, who had rescued me or not? I wondered, but without any possibility of arriving at a definite conclusion; though the more I debated the point the more I was inclined to think it was. However, rescued I had been, and after an uneventful voyage I landed in England, full of gratitude and safe and sound.

Once at home and I fell into my place quickly enough, and before very long Ellen and I were married, and were as entirely foolish, and more than as happy, as the majority of men and women at that delightfully "silly season" of their lives.

Needless, perhaps, to say, at such a time the memory of "Fido" and Japan had faded almost entirely from my mind, until the opening of the Japanese Village in London served to remind me not unpleasantly of both.

Naturally enough Ellen wished to go, and go alone with me. She must be "personally conducted," and have it all explained by one who had seen them in their "native lair" and knew something at least of their native "lingo"; must hear with her own ears that I could make my-

self really understood, and not, as in Paris, find myself driven in despair to fall back upon the grinning English waiter.

So, again quite naturally, we went, and, the honeymoon not having waned, we did the show after a lazy and altogether perfunctory fashion of our own, which led us to sit about in quiet corners, "the world forgetting," but not by any means "by the world forgot"; as we found when we woke up to consciousness of the many glances, either scoffing or sympathetic, that were turned in our direction.

Then it was that, being nothing if not original, we straightway resolved to go to the other extreme, and behave "quite as though we were old married people."

Ellen should go alone and get herself a cup of tea, while I—well, I would stroll about and we would meet again, say, in a quarter of an hour; so, after carefully comparing watches, I started off on my solitary tour.

Dear Ellen, what a sweet, delightful girl she was, to be sure, ran the burden of my song; and what a lucky, undeserving dog was I! I lounged along, too absorbed in my own happiness to notice what was going on around.

I was still engrossed, passing in review a whole twelvemonth of uninterrupted bliss, and was smiling to myself at the memory of the Dunmow Flitch, when I was startled by a sudden inarticulate cry of delighted recognition, felt a hand laid gently on my arm, and, when I looked round, sure enough it was Fido—poor little Fido—with the tears of joy streaming from her eyes, and laughing and sobbing all in a breath.

Poor little Fido! My heart sank, and I glanced round involuntarily to find we were alone, or if not alone, there was no one near who knew me, I concluded, with, perhaps, an over-obvious relief.

The hand was promptly withdrawn, and the voice sobbed out:

"You not know me—not glad to see me?"

"Not know you? Why, of course I do, and I am—very glad. Why should I not be?" I answered quickly, at the same time taking both her hands reassuringly in mine, and, "Why not, indeed?" I repeated to myself more than once; while Fido went on to tell how she had taken the opportunity afforded by the coming of certain friends to London to place herself under their charge all unknown to her father, whose consent she had made no pretence of asking. Indeed, the same might

be said as to the friends on whose generosity she had thrown herself after leaving port as a kind of modified though solvent stowaway, at an hour such as effectually forbade all question of return, thus leaving them no responsibility of deciding as to whether she should go or stay.

This much I learned, but with difficulty; for owing to the excitement of our sudden meeting, her English was more broken and her Japanese more fluent than I had ever known them before. Nor was I so tranquilly receptive as to favour a speedier mutual understanding.

What time I was listening to her moving tale and duly sympathising therewith, I was busy speculating as to how best to meet the farther difficulties that were evidently far from suggesting themselves to my companion, who, I could see, innocently assumed that now we had met, all her troubles were at an end; whereas mine, I feared, were only just beginning, for my wife might turn up at any moment and find us together, and—what was I to tell her? The truth, of course; but "what was the truth to be?"

Ellen certainly was the dearest girl in all the world, and we were so tremendously happy just then that—really, what ought I to do?

I had suffered such unpleasantness and had run the gauntlet of so much unbelieving chaff from Englefield and the rest with reference to Fido and my mistake, that I had thought it far the wiser course, on my return, to avoid all mention of the incident beyond, perhaps, a casual reference to the fact of my native host having had daughters. Not to mention the matter then had appeared the easiest way out of the difficulty. Now, however, not having spoken of it was in itself the trouble.

Now that I was married I ought to invite her to my house. So much, hospitality clearly demanded. But how would Ellen like a previously unheard-of Japanese young lady quartered indefinitely upon us? For that she had no intention of going back was quickly made apparent. If only I had been open and told Ellen all about her before, she might have taken kindly to the little thing, who was so young and far from home, and so greatly in need of kindness and protection, but whose very innocence and impulsiveness made it impossible to forecast what she might do next.

All this and more I thought, with one ear open to Fido's innocent prattle, and the other listening for my wife's return;

my divided attention having its effect on my companion, whom alternately it chilled and reassured.

But I might have spared both myself and her. Long before I had laid my plans, Ellen reappeared, and far from being jealous—an absurdity of which, under the circumstances, I might surely have known she was incapable—after hearing my explanation, she, too, fell into my original error and treated Fido as the merest child, so that, after I had introduced them and told of the many obligations I was under, she it was who suggested inviting the stranger to our home. And I, though conscious of her mistake, weakly allowed it to pass as offering the readiest way out of my dilemma. Nor, in my relief, did I notice Fido's change of manner; or, if I did, I set it down to a shyness which would wear off when my wife and she grew better friends. With that, after explaining our intention to those supposed to have Fido in charge—who it appeared knew me quite well, but whom, owing to my ridiculous infirmity, I failed to recognise—we left for home in a cab.

I really thought I had done wisely in leaving Ellen to her first impression, for under its influence she treated our visitor much as I had done myself, and at once made of her quite a pet; any little want of accord between fact and fancy being accounted for as differences of race and habit.

But Fido I noticed was greatly changed. She was as entirely docile and tractable as ever, but had lost all her old frank and winning ways; had grown strangely thoughtful—at times even moody and abstracted—so much so as to lead my wife to suppose her homesick.

With this, accordingly, she taxed her, and in her well-meant efforts to reconcile her to her stay, reminded her how, in about a week, the exhibition would be over, when she would soon be on her way back to the home and friends she must be longing so to see.

At which reminder Fido seemed unaccountably surprised and more distressed than ever. She appeared as though about to speak, but stopped to glance after a shy and almost appealing fashion at me, leaving me suddenly doubtful as to the entire wisdom of my plan, and as to whether, after all, further complications might not even yet be left in store.

But, no; beyond growing still more shy and developing a tendency—so Ellen told

me—to disappear and be found in odd corners with her eyes full of tears, or gazing dreamily, and Ellen feared somewhat drearily, out of windows, without ever being able to speak of what she saw, the week passed over peacefully enough. Almost too quietly, although we tried all we knew to make it pleasant by taking her to such theatres or sights as were at all likely to interest her; but all without effect.

Always when asked would she answer: "Oh, yes; it was nice—so nice; she was much pleased," but not as though her heart were in it, and always was she glad to get home and rest, for—she was so tired. She who at home had flitted about unwearingly the whole day long was always tired, until Ellen grew anxious about her health, and whispered that London must not suit her, and that she should indeed be glad for her to go back to her own home and her native air. While I—well, I, too, was ill at ease, for that something was wrong was only too clear. Gone was all the old innocent abandon, all the lightness of heart, and gone, too, all the merry little ways, while sometimes I would turn and meet an expression in her eyes which made my heart ache; and I, too, thought she would be far better at home.

Ellen and I went down to the boat to see her off, after a touching scene in which the poor "child," as my wife still called her, insisted on giving her everything she had with her in the way of trinket or ornament, leaving herself entirely destitute of both, the while she refused firmly, and with a curious settled obstinacy, to take any present, however trifling, in return. Nor would she explain why. "No, indeed no," was all she would say, pushing whatever was offered her aside—she should not need them where she was going, which was her excuse also for parting with her own things. And the singularity of the excuse or reason left me with a strange, haunting dread, for which I could not account, but thought it better to conceal; for what, indeed, could she mean? The last we saw of her was a still, lifeless-looking face, with little more of expression on it than has a mask, but with a terrible sadness latent in the eyes, which I, at all events, shall never quite forget, as she stood there quietly unresponsive, gazing back at us over the side as we waved our encouraging farewells, and the vessel bore her smoothly but inexorably from our sight.

That was the last I ever saw of "my friendly Jap." At odd times—mostly those still and sleepless watches of the night, when one's memory serves only to reproach—I have wondered whether I were in any way to blame; but there, poor little Fido! I have told you all I know—more than ever I have told my wife.

ELLEN'S POSTSCRIPT.

I nevertheless both saw and understood more than you supposed, but, let us hope wisely, held my peace.

Poor little Fido indeed! I, too, was troubled to let her leave us so; but what could we do?

Later, I read the paragraph subjoined in an English paper posted from Japan. I destroyed the paper for fear my husband should see it.

"When the P. & O. steamer 'Chimborazo' arrived in Yokohama yesterday, having on board the natives who so lately inhabited the Japanese Village in London, her captain reported the loss overboard, in mid-ocean, of a young Japanese girl of good family, whose name unfortunately our reporter could not learn. What makes the affair peculiarly distressing is that from the statement of those who had the young lady in charge, she left her home in Japan unknown to her parents and friends, who were anxiously looking forward to her return. It would appear that she was in the habit of staying on deck until long after the others had retired, and it is supposed that owing to a sudden lurch of the vessel she must have fallen overboard, though the captain reports the passage as exceptionally calm. From the time she was first missed nothing was ever seen or heard of her again."

No, nothing was ever seen or heard of her again. And my husband does not even know that she is dead. I, too, sometimes have wondered— But there—poor little Fido!—she alone could have told.

THE LATE MRS. VERNON.

By A. MOBERLY.

Author of "Lady Valeria," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A STRAY September sunbeam found its way into the school-room one morning. It was the first I had ever seen there, and

I stopped in my work of clearing away books and slates to blink at it with as much disfavour as any owl. I didn't want it there, dancing all over the dingy wall, impertinently illuminating dirt and discomfort, and making shabbiness tenfold shabbier—the shabbiness of things new and old; the respectable shabbiness of age and wear in the second, third, and fourth-hand furniture, and elsewhere the squalid deterioration that comes of bad material and scamped workmanship. Blotchy new paper peeled off damp new plaster, cracks gaped in the crooked mantel-shelf, the door wouldn't stay shut, and the window wouldn't stay open, the spring-blind wouldn't draw down, and the trumpery ormolu gaselier wouldn't stay up.

I knew it by heart; the stains and ink-spatters, the scraps of paper, clippings of dress-stuffs, and crumbs from the last children's meal, the fireless grate piled high with litter, and the dust dancing in little whirlpools under Bertie's bed in the corner when the door swayed in the draught. I knew it all and hated it, or would have done so had I not by long persistence made myself blind to it.

It was an unbeautiful spot, but all the home I had; this, with a corner of the attic overhead, which I shared with Lulu and Tottie, and a great stack of their mother's basket trunks and Major Tarrant's portmanteaux. I had no wish to quarrel with it. My life during the long seven years that I had spent with the Tarrants had been lived in similarly unattractive quarters, the back regions of smart second-rate lodgings, and I knew nothing better. With each one of our countless moves I had conscientiously made a fresh beginning, scrubbed and dusted, pinned up pictures from the "Graphic" and "Illustrated," and spent my few spare shillings on gasmen and window-cleaners; but exhausted by the unequal struggle, invariably ended by resigning myself to the casual good offices of the overworked general servant, content if I could only keep my immediate belongings fairly decent. No wonder I felt small gratitude towards that intrusive sunbeam for needlessly emphasizing my latest failure.

It gave better light for my work, that was one advantage. Our morning's lessons were over, but the real business of the day had yet to commence. I propped the untrustworthy window open with the French dictionary, drew the sewing-machine forward, and got out my work-basket.

How green and rubbed the sleeves of my black cashmere were growing, and that crack in the side of my shoe was getting bigger! I knew I was dingy and faded enough to be in perfect keeping with my surroundings, but I didn't care to be reminded of the fact.

As I took the cover off the sewing-machine two of my little pupils trotted in—stylish young persons, in elaborately-smocked frocks and Liberty hats. They were small and stunted for their ages, but by dint of careful dressing and much display of fair, severely crimped hair, passed for "sweet little creatures" with an indiscriminating public. Both were equipped with spades and buckets, and Tottie, moreover, carried her big india-rubber ball. Tottie's big ball and big blue innocent eyes had been useful in effecting many desirable introductions before this.

"Not gone yet, children?" I asked.

"We were waiting to see which way the St. Maur children were going to-day, and I've been trying to make Bertie tidy. He's put on his clean suit and his best hat, but he wouldn't let me wash him, and he's very sticky. He's been helping cook. He says nobody ever notices him, and he has promised to keep his hands in his pockets if we meet any one we know; they are very black."

"Oh, and please, Miss Margison, Algy is lost. He took the greengrocer's basket and dropped all the potatoes over the cliff, and then said he was going to run away to Nurse Jane at the camp; but we think he went to the harbour. Do you s'pose he'll be killed?"

"No, I don't; but that's cook's business, not mine. He'll be home in time for dinner, I dare say."

I should personally have been quite resigned to Algy's being lost for an indefinite period—spoilt little wretch!

"Now run away. Use your handkerchief, Tottie, and turn your toes out."

"Good-bye, dear Miss Margison. I wish you were coming," and with graceful little nods of farewell they departed.

They were always polite, or, when necessary, affectionate. They had no childish vices. They never fought, or romped, or flew into passions, and were sharp as needles over their lessons. They seldom played of their own initiative, but were always ready to join others, if the others were desirable acquaintances, and seldom or never cried. Tottie certainly had wailed gently for five minutes last week; but that was in the

drawing-room, when old Colonel Sampleton called to say good-bye, and she got a pound of chocolate creams and a gold bangle as a reward of the performance, much to Lulu's disgust.

A distant surge of the sea, stray notes of a military band and the voices of promenaders without, drifted in through the open window. The sunbeam seemed to have brought them all in its train for my special disturbance. Why could I not have been left in peace with the reposeful view of our neighbour's blank brick wall and the society of the ghostly shrouded dress-stand in the corner, attired in Mrs. Tarrant's new blue serge costume pinned up in newspapers? A "panel" of scarlet cloth and a waistcoat to match, both covered with endless rows of gold braid, lay awaiting completion in my work-basket.

I had certainly never covenanted to make Mrs. Tarrant's dresses when she engaged me as governess, nor yet to act as nurse, hairdresser, and, on an emergency, cook and tailoress, yet I had found myself fulfilling all these functions in the course of the years during which I had followed the fortunes of the Tarrants from one military station to another.

It was too late in the day for me to be fastidious. The qualifications for a governess which had served seven years ago were of little use now. I had had no chance of keeping up with modern methods of teaching, no array of certificates to display, not even a high-class reference to give. I was out of the race for a living; Mrs. Tarrant knew it as well as I did, and made her profit out of the knowledge.

Stopping to rest my eyes I raised them to the opposite wall. The sunbeam had travelled round there. I think it was reflected from a swinging lattice high up in the opposite house which some one at that moment shut, for it gave a final flash and disappeared. The flash shot across a date-card marked "September Fifth," and thence, so it seemed, straight into my unwilling brain, pouring its unwelcome light on all the grey, dismal store of recollections there as it had illumined the squalid dreariness of my actual outward surroundings. My birthday! And I was thirty!

It came to me with no memory of gift or greeting. In all the long, lonely years of my life I had never been wished a happy return of the day, nor had wished it for myself. It was only marked for me as the day on which, seven years ago, shy, forlorn, helpless, and ignorant of the

world's ways as any nun driven from her cloister, I left school to begin life for myself as governess at Major Tarrant's. It must have been in answer to some question of Baby Bertie's that I had let the date escape me, to hear it, with horror, retailed to the assembled family at luncheon.

"Miss Margison's birthday, is it?" echoed Major Tarrant in his rasping voice. "She's not expecting a present, I hope. No followers and no perquisites—those are the rules of my establishment. Haw! haw!" and the Major laughed noisily at his own facetiousness, while I, shrinking with shyness, made a mental resolve to make no more personal admissions.

Major Tarrant was big, loud, and bad-mannered, but not unkindly by nature. Going upstairs to my room after dinner, I heard his harsh voice below me in the hall answering, it would seem, some joking expostulation of his wife's.

"Hurt her feelings, did I? Stuff and nonsense! Better to have a clear understanding at once and for ever. Perhaps she was a little low, too—poor wretch. Here, Bertie, here's half-a-crown. Go and buy her a present—from yourself. Tell Jane to take you out," and the Major tramped off, slamming the door.

"Give it to mother, Bertie darling, and we'll go and choose a pretty thing together;" and that was the last I heard of it. Once Mrs. Tarrant's fingers closed on anything they were apt to hold it tight.

She was a plump, childish-looking little creature, with a very small waist, to which she alluded three times a day on an average, neutral-tinted hair and complexion, a noisy voice, and a caressing, kittenish manner contradicted by the expression of two hard little blue eyes, anxious, mean, and greedy. The gods had gifted her with unbounded impudence and imperturbable good-temper, unmarred by the workings of either heart or conscience.

She was mortally afraid of her husband, who was a severe disciplinarian, and regulated the household himself down to its minutest details—luckily for us. He used to audit the accounts nightly, and wring his wife's greedy, pleasure-loving soul by sternly refusing her a penny beyond her regular allowance, and permitting no debts. She would laugh good-temperedly always, and sometimes give up the desired new gown or party of pleasure, but not often. The nursery supply of butter

would be mysteriously stopped for a week, or the children's washing-bills be cut down one-half, and the Major certainly was none the wiser.

She was great at finance. I knew that she contrived to screw double the worth of my pay out of me every day, and I found a grim enjoyment in watching her treat every one within reach in the same fashion, from the last joined subaltern who was permitted to lose a dozen pairs of gloves to her on the garrison steeplechase, or bank with her at "penny nap," to the elderly veteran who was induced to drop the smallest coin he had about him into Lulu's missionary-box.

She had never treated me rudely, or with anything but the kindest, almost sisterly consideration. Pleasant words and caressing ways cost nothing, and sometimes bear interest. She always made me come in to her afternoon teas, and went the length of lending me small bits of decoration for the occasion. I accepted her civilities as I should have done her neglect, with the same dull indifference that passed with me in those days for contentment. Nothing in the years we spent together ever drew me closer to her. Not the long, tedious illness through which I nursed her faithfully, nor the baby life which I tended and strove to preserve for her. I know she only regarded me as a valuable possession, not to be abused, but to be used to the utmost and thrown away when done with, and I owed her no grudge for the knowledge. I think my one active personal sentiment in those days was a hard secret pride in piling up service on service as a debt which she could never pay.

Not a good or a wholesome state of mind, as that morning I became aware for the first time. Was it the sunbeam's doing that a new vague unrest stirred within me, that I began to look back on my life from the standpoint of my present experience, questioning how far I might have moulded it differently, how far I had been the blindfold slave of circumstance?

My life. A pitiful retrospect. In its earliest beginnings I could recall no mother, no home, no childhood. I had a father—sometimes a smart, spruce father, with a cigar in his mouth, his hat on one side, and a flower in his buttonhole; sometimes a shabby, sleepy, unkempt father, thick of speech and surly of temper. I have dim recollections of long journeys and late suppers; of inns, and of chambermaids, kind or cross as the case might be, putting

me to bed; of excursion trains, noisy streets, shouting men, and a general atmosphere of race-week, stable talk, bets, and bad language.

Then suddenly I see myself perched on a tall chair, swinging my small legs and staring straight into Aunt Hitty's face—a sharp, kindly old face, looking out of a close net cap-border with a pair of keen, spectacled eyes that examine me from head to foot so searchingly that mine, in confusion, wander away round the stuffy little room, with its scant, well-preserved furniture, its row of black silhouette portraits over the mantelpiece, the piping bullfinch in its cage, and the three fat, blind puppies sprawling over their fat mother in a basket on the rug. A gaunt, surly maid, standing bolt upright behind my aunt's chair, embarrasses me still more by the sniffs and snorts of disparagement she gives at intervals, directed pointedly at me or my father, who lounges on the shiny horse-hair sofa, twirling his cane and pointing out my merits in an airy, dispassionate manner.

"A good, handy little thing. Shouldn't wonder if she grows up pretty. Clever, too, if she had any teaching. I can't keep her any longer, that's certain, at any rate."

"We can't do with another here," pronounces the maid decidedly. "Where's she to sleep?"

"Poor Bessie's child. All the kin I've got, Metty," pipes the old lady in the chair. "Dick Margison, th'art a shiftless, feckless ne'er-do-weel. I'll do nowt for thee. She mun go to school. I'll pay for her, and when I die she'll have all I've got to leave." Then I am let to slide down on the rug and cuddle the puppies.

School, and school, and school. A cheap one first, and then a cheaper when my father died, and his very irregular contributions towards my support finally stopped. I was worked hard by a hard-working mistress, teaching the juniors, learning myself as I could. No time for play, for schoolgirl friendships. Girls came, and went as they came—strangers to me. The masters I learnt from and the children I taught were no more to me than the books and blackboards, part of the school furniture, that was all. Looking back on those years I could see how many little kindnesses I must have received with stupid irresponsiveness. I was pleased and grateful, but didn't know how to show it. I was imposed upon as well now and then, bullied, over-tasked, insulted, but met the

bad as I did the good with the same dull stoicism.

Teach, and teach, and teach. I did my work well and thoroughly, I am sure of that. I stayed on and on, giving good value for a small wage, thankful for food and shelter, too spiritless to ask for anything further, neither glad nor sorry to go when my employer conscientiously insisted on my accepting the Tarrants' offer of an engagement as the best ever likely to fall in my way.

Here my braid ran out suddenly to an end. I jerked it away impatiently. "The best life was able to afford me." I spoke it half aloud, and dropping my hands in my lap looked round me in mute protest. Half my life lived, and what was the outcome? A pile of unfinished work, a row of tattered school-books on the shelf, a few pounds in the Post Office Savings' Bank, and my sole hope for the future, that of clinging to the Tarrants as long as they would keep me, working harder each year and receiving less. After that—Here a hard, high little voice outside suddenly recalled me from the profitless Past and hopeless Future to the pressing claims of the actual Present, and, undoing a fresh hank of braid, I commenced to reel it off on my braider, taking myself hastily to task for my morbid notions. What had come to me? My share of life might be meagre and flavourless, but it had been as much as I had ever desired or deserved. What did I want to change in it? Did I envy Mrs. Tarrant her millinery, her Major, the society of the gilded military youth which she affected? No; a dozen times no; no more than I would change this dismal room for the twopenny halfpenny smartness of her drawing-room, or for the Major's grim orderly den in the basement. Was I such a fool as to pray for my daily bread, and then quarrel with it because the supply of butter sometimes fell short, literally as well as figuratively? Again, not I! And I set my wheel a-going with fresh vigour.

"Oh, you dear, good soul! Are you slaving over that frock instead of getting a little sunshine and fresh air this lovely day?" cried Mrs. Tarrant from the doorway.

She looked as incongruous as the sunbeam as she tripped in amongst the surrounding dinginess in her fresh grey costume, with a pink satin waistcoat, and a sailor hat with a pink ribbon poised on her sleek little head.

"You kind creature! Do you think you can really get it done for me to wear to-morrow at the polo match? You needn't trouble about the children's afternoon lessons if you think you can. I've asked dear old Nurse Jane to come to tea with them. She does so enjoy seeing her boy Algy, and I know she'll get the panel in if you'll do the vest. It makes her so happy doing anything for us."

I assented without enthusiasm to an afternoon of dressmaking with Nurse Jane, who had married a soldier at the camp, and was honoured now and then with an invitation to come over and make herself useful.

Mrs. Tarrant watched me for a minute or so; then suddenly broke out:

"What do you think my husband has done? Such an absurd blunder! He was writing me a cheque to-day, and went and made it payable to you. I said he needn't worry; it would be all right. You will only have to endorse it, you know."

"Why didn't he tear it up and write another?" I asked in my stupid way.

"Oh, I don't know. He might have come to the end of his cheque-book, perhaps, and the bank isn't open to-day, you know. However, you can make it all right directly. Just put your name there."

She laid the slip before me with her small grey-gloved finger-tip on a particular spot. I got the blotting-paper out and lifted the ink down very deliberately. Major Tarrant's blunder puzzled me, and I wanted to think about it. Why should he have put my name instead of his wife's?

It could not have been intended for me, I assured myself as I tried the nib of my pen; he had paid me yesterday, and I had cashed the cheque an hour after. The money, seven pounds ten, was in my pocket at the moment. It must have been a blunder; nothing but the irritable captious mood that I was in could make me doubt it.

"Will you let me see how my name is filled in, if you please?" I asked, pushing her finger away. She resisted for a second—only for a second—just long enough to let me feel that she did resist. I turned the paper.

"Elizabeth H. Margison," I read in the Major's clear, crooked script, "the sum of seven pounds ten." My quarter's salary. It was an odd coincidence.

"Of course it couldn't have been meant for me!" I asked, writing "Elizabeth"

very carefully, and then stopping to look up at her.

Her twinkling little blue eyes met mine, and then twinkled away again. She laughed as if I had made a little joke.

"Be quick, there's a dear; Captain Fanshaw is waiting for me."

I laughed in return.

"It's a quarter's salary. You might intend to give me notice," I answered, and went on writing; but, even as I spoke, sundry floating rumours, scraps of children's talk, and chance words of servants' gossip rushed into my mind and for the first time took intelligible meaning.

"I have written 'Howarth' in full. Will that matter?"

"Not a bit. Do be quick; I've left the children all to themselves."

"Is it true that Major Tarrant is going to the Cape?" I demanded, carefully forming the second loop of my "M."

"No, of course not—not in the least likely."

"Then where is he going?"

I stopped to get a hair out of my pen as I asked.

"Going? Oh, to the Marquesas, I suppose, if he goes anywhere. His cousin, Sir Algy Tarrant, wants to take him as military secretary. There, you've broken your pen, wiping it so hard. Take another."

"Shall you go with him?"

I was hunting in my box of nibs, and spoke carelessly.

"Of course I shall. It's a capital appointment, and I shall be the only lady on the staff. Sir Algy will be glad to get me to play hostess at Government House."

She straightened her little waist complacently.

"And what shall you arrange about me?"

"How can I tell when I don't know myself?" She tapped the table impatiently. "How long do you mean to keep me? I'll let you know as soon as I do myself—in good time, you may be sure. You shall have your month's notice."

"A quarter's, if you please. That was the agreement."

"A quarter's? Oh dear, no! I remember perfectly. I told you what uncertain lives we poor military wretches lead. How could we afford to give you three months' salary for nothing?"

"I think Major Tarrant intended doing so, nevertheless," I said, looking steadily at her. "Yes, I really think this cheque was intended for me. Let me go and ask

him. I hear him talking to Captain Fanshaw in the hall."

"No; I'll go, if it will satisfy you. Give me the cheque."

I handed it over. She picked it up, looked first into the unfinished signature and then into my face. She was as near to losing her temper as she had ever been in her life.

"Perhaps you would rather see him yourself, though. I've no doubt you think you could get it out of him if you ask prettily enough."

Her eyes seemed to snap a spark of spite as she threw the cheque down before me. I paid no attention. I had taken out a sheet of letter paper and was neatly writing out a receipt, which I stamped and signed and dated in silence.

"How soon do you wish me to go?"

"We've got the Wadsworths to take this house off our hands from the end of next week," she said, sulky, but unabashed. "You will have to stay behind and do the inventory, and give the house up to them. Major Tarrant is going up to-morrow about his outfit."

"And the children?"

"Oh, we shall send the girls off to their grandmother. Major Tarrant will take them down when he goes to say good-bye to her. She won't like it, so we shan't tell her they are coming. She can't well refuse then. Bertie will go to school with Bob and Archie, and I'm sure Nurse Jane will like to have Algy for a few weeks till we can settle him somewhere. Major Tarrant is worrying to take him with us."

She shrugged her shoulders, and looked comically resigned. She was quite her serene self again by this time.

"What do you think? I'm off to Paris next Tuesday. Mrs. Crofton wants some one to go with her, as she can't speak a word of French. I can shop for her and take care of her, you know. So we shall all be disposed of. I'll leave a list of what I want to have done before the Wads-

worths come in. You shall have a charwoman to help you, of course. I'm sure you'll enjoy the rest."

Then she adjusted her draperies, tried different effects with the braid, and tripped away airily.

I sat by myself, working steadily for an hour or two more. The cheque lay on the table, and I glanced at it now and then with wonder, and a grim satisfaction in my own newly-discovered audacity.

What a chance it had been for her! Unless I had been thoroughly roused I should never have dared to claim it. I could see myself meekly pocketing my two pounds ten in lieu of a month's notice, and the balance would have come in so usefully for her in Paris. Poor disappointed little woman, I could afford to pity her.

And myself? It took me some little time to realise that I was from that moment absolutely cut adrift for the first time in my life. What was I to do? Where was I to go? I had heard of governesses' homes in London. I must find one, and get placed as soon as possible. Old Aunt Hitty was still alive, but I could expect nothing more from her. She had spent all her small savings on my education, and had made her will, leaving me sole heiress of her few possessions. Her faithful maid was dead, and she now lived with some kind neighbours with whom her small income just kept her in comfort, but would stretch no farther. I was alone in the world, absolutely alone, and dependent on my own resources from henceforth.

It was an odd, abrupt ending to seven years of faithful service; but the only natural one, as I admitted, with stern justice. I had put no love into the labour, why should I expect any with the wages?

Meanwhile, as I thought I stitched, and stitched, and the blue and scarlet serge was finished to time.

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